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C O N F I D E N T I A L UNVIE VIENNA 000630

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IAEA](#) [MNUC](#) [KNNP](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: ELBARADEI DESPAIRS ON PROSPECTS FOR SYRIA  
INVESTIGATION

REF: UNVIE 618

Classified By: Ambassador Gregory Schulte for reasons 1.4 (c) and (e)

¶1. (C) Summary: Meeting with the Ambassador on November 26, IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei reaffirmed his disagreement with US efforts to block the Agency's nuclear reactor feasibility Technical Cooperation (TC) program for Syria and offered suggestions for a framework (subsequently adopted by the Board of Governors) to ensure continued close scrutiny of the project. Responding to the Ambassador's criticisms of the procurement elements of the TC project, the Director General offered his "personal assurance" that procurement "will happen only when technically required." Updating on the IAEA investigation into the undeclared Al Kibar reactor, ElBaradei editorialized that his Syrian interlocutor, Ibrahim Othman, was completely in the dark regarding the facility at Al Kibar. End Summary.

The DG Wades In  
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¶2. (C) Following several messages from UNVIE to the Secretariat questioning the Director General's tactics in delivering a highly inappropriate public endorsement of the Syria TC project, and then recusing himself from the subsequent fight inside the IAEA Board, ElBaradei asked to see the Ambassador early on November 26. Noting that the issue "will only become worse if it goes to the Board," ElBaradei advised that we shouldn't focus on "how we got here -- the issue is how we fix this mess." The DG argued that the Syrian state is controlled by their military, and therefore the questions about the Al Kibar facility will be resolved only through a political understanding, and not by working through technical counterparts like Ibrahim Othman. "They are totally separated," ElBaradei editorialized, so Washington would be well advised to approach Damascus on a political level or via the military "to help them get out of their hole."

¶3. (C) ElBaradei endorsed a statement developed by the Secretariat that accommodated three key US goals: signaling continued close IAEA scrutiny of the TC project for a nuclear reactor feasibility study, reaffirming the phased character of procurements for this project, and reserving to Board members the right to revisit this project in light of developments in the safeguards investigation of the Al Kibar reactor site. In appealing to us to accept this compromise, ElBaradei emphasized his view that this was not the right issue on which to challenge Syria. The political sensitivities around TC (and the sense among developing countries that TC is an entitlement) made the Syria project a lightning rod for other delegations. Without conceding ElBaradei's point on the TC project, the Ambassador agreed that the only parties benefiting from divisions within the Board of Governors are Iran and Syria. "That doesn't serve our purpose or help the Agency," he cautioned. But, the Ambassador continued, "the IAEA has to do its job," which in

this case should have included earlier scrutiny of the Syria project

Counsel for the Defense

14. (C) ElBaradei replied that there are two distinct issues -- the IAEA's obligation to strictly implement its rules for a country (Syria) that has not been found guilty of any safeguards violation, and the integrity of the TC process. Frankly, he added, "you could have done this like the French" and simply noted that you would have preferred for the project to have been delayed, without actually threatening to block it. Returning to his exposition on Syrian politics, ElBaradei emphasized that Othman and the Syrian Ambassador in Vienna "aren't in the loop." "We will write more letters," the DG continued, "but without a political opening it's not moving...we're at the end of our wits." "This thing will not be solved technically."

15. (C) Echoing his November 20 comments to Under Secretary Rood, ElBaradei argued that on both Syria and Iran the IAEA "is just going through the motions" as long as the governments concerned are holding out for direct engagement from Washington. In the case of Syria, however, the division of the Board of Governors will endanger other US priorities, to include the Additional Protocol, the proposal for an internationally administered nuclear fuel bank, and engagement on nuclear safety. "This should have been handled differently," he again complained.

16. (C) Concluding the Syria discussion, ElBaradei offered his "personal assurance" that procurement "will happen only when technically required." In the meantime, he promised, the DG would use his engagement with the Syrians to send the message back to President Asad regarding the Al Kibar investigation that "this thing doesn't look good for you and you need to get yourselves out of the hole."

17. (C) Comment: ElBaradei refused to take responsibility for a problem that he created by blocking the Board Chair's efforts to defer the Syria TC project. His advice on Syrian politics sounds like his long-standing message on Iran -- that the only way to get cooperation is through a political settlement that can only be achieved by direct US engagement. Whatever the merits of his political assessment, we will continue to remind him that his job is not political, but to press forward with the IAEA investigation and to press the governments involved for full disclosure of their clandestine activities. End Comment.  
SCHULTE